

# **"Names like Trumpets"**

*and Other Poems*

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RALF L. F. SHELDON-WILLIAMS, M.M.



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# *“Names like Trumpets”*

## *and Other Poems*

*By*

RALF SHELDON-WILLIAMS, M.M.

Canadian Expeditionary Force

Author of

*“The Canadian Front in France and Flanders”*

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With warm good wishes,  
From a fond sister.  
Christmas 1924.

## NAMES LIKE TRUMPETS

---

("Places . . . with names like trumpets." London "Observer," August 5, 1917.)

---

Martinpuich and Pozieres,  
Courcelette and Guillemont,  
Mouquet Farm, Le Sars and Flers,  
Contalmaison, Destremont.

Mellow as orchard beneath Autumn's caresses,  
Sweet to the tongue as fruit ripe to the wooing  
Were our names in the dead rose-red days ere war's stresses  
Shocked us from dreams to our piteous undoing.

Souchez River, Carency,  
Angres, the Bois d'Hirondelle,  
Lievin and Givenchy,  
Vimy's height and Vimy's hell.

Mellow as anthems our belfries once chanted,  
Sweet to the ear as a trumpet's far crying,  
Shall our names be for all time, though, history-haunted,  
Our streets and our orchards lie outraged and dying.

Honour's gentle accolade  
Falls on every knightly name.  
Hear the faint fanfaronade,  
Silver-sweet, each style proclaim.

(Before Lens, August 15th, 1917.)

## GILD NO GOLDEN MEMORY

("A movement has been inaugurated to erect a monument at Rheims in commemoration of the Cathedral of Notre Dame." *Vide Daily Press, September, 1914.*)

---

I pray you let me wend—  
Stay not my spirit with your outstretched hands,  
Loving, but over-fond; no fumbling bands  
May staunch this ebbing tide;  
Alone save for my pride  
And God—leave me with Him to make the end.

These fifteen reeking hours,  
With those my fifteen storied centuries  
Gorged and bloated, squat beneath your eyes,  
Which yesterday in vain  
Sought to embrace my fane  
In one long rapture, crying, "This is ours!"

Of Our Liege Lady's grace  
My kings have craved their crowning at my gift.  
O untoward fate! that I, with scanty shrift,  
Must don this withering crown  
Of death, unknightly thrown  
By yon base churl, who fouls a king's high place!

The faggot and the flame—  
Whence soared to Heaven the soul of La Pucelle,  
She whom my cloistered spirit loved so well,  
And in due season saw  
France to her Lord restore—  
Were sister spawn of Hell to this my shame.

Where rest my martyr-saints;  
Where my apostles and my virgins; all  
That gentle fellowship of niche and stall  
And gilded canopy?  
In fuller panoply  
Find they a sanctuary from man-made straits?

For now that fair demesne  
Of vaulted choir, groined roof and pinnacle,  
Crocket and cusp, stone steeped in miracle,  
Where they were wont to cry,  
Silent, unceasingly,  
The Master-BUILDER's praise, is riven in twain.

So cover I my face  
That men spoke well of; yield my dust to dust,  
Ashes to live ashes, earth to red earth. Yet must  
My soul unsleeping brood  
About the shadowy Rood,  
Which eyes of pure and good report may trace.

But weld no chain for me;  
No harsh "Hic Jacet" raise, no cenotaph  
Of weary bronze. Memory my epitaph  
Of Loveliness sublime  
Defying Death and Time  
Shall blazon on men's hearts eternally.

September 29th, 1914,  
Cowichan Station,  
Vancouver Island, B.C.

---

## TO A BELGIAN BOY

---

So they've broken your quaint little home in bits;  
Trampled your checker-board garden to mud;  
Where your tiny chair stood, now a big gun sits,  
But it sneers at porridge, and bellows for blood.  
Smashed is the fine blue plate of Delft  
That used to rest on the ingle-shelf;  
And the old copper coffee-pot shines no more  
In the glint of the sun through the open door.

When the "bon papa" hurried away that day,  
Dropping his blouse and his old "sabots,"  
You straight picked them up in your manly way,  
As you picked up his jobs, and all "ces choses"  
Which you knew he'd to drop for other work  
Which wouldn't wait, so you didn't shirk,  
But flung out your chest as a good boy should,  
And milked the old cow and chopped the wood.

And, now, you're adrift on the long high-way  
Which leads where the good God only can tell;  
But you trudge, strong and sturdy, as a brave boy may,  
With a scornful "pouf" for the hosts of Hell!  
Your father may lie on some hideous field,  
But your mother is here, and needs a shield;  
And the little sister, cuddled in her tired arms,  
Wants a big brother handy in case of alarms.

*Salut!* you plucky little Belgian boy,  
We all want to give you a lift on the way  
Back to your chores and your mended toy,  
Back to your healed old home some day;  
To your jolly old saints, Michel and Pierre,  
Who will smile a welcome, while they drop a tear  
For a child made man in a school too sure,  
Kneeling once more at the old "*prie-dieu*."

October, 1914,  
Cowichan Station,  
Vancouver Island, B.C.

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## ICH DIEN

(N.B.—The Prince of Wales left for the front on November 16, 1914.)

---

This high prerogative of my estate,  
Rusting too long in dalliance of name,  
Now clamant chafes for utterance in deed.  
The burden of the future, aureate, dim,  
In heaviest thought as yet galls not my back,  
Scarce loosed from boyhood's little, laughing cares;  
My hand frets not for orb; my head for crown;  
No bannered dreams make pageant of my blood.  
Only I seek to serve:  
As that Arthurian boy at manhood's brim  
Who sought man-service in the press of men:  
To draw this maiden sword for Right and Faith;  
To sheathe it only at the honour's sake  
Of our dear England, whom through life till death  
I serve.

November, 1914,  
Cowichan Station,  
Vancouver Island, B.C.

# "THE PASSING OF "BOBS BAHADUR"

November 15, 1914.

(Note.—There were many among the admirers of the great soldier who thought that a tomb more worthy of, or at least more suitable to Lord Roberts and his work, than one in St. Paul's or even Westminster Abbey should have been cut for him in the fastnesses of the Northwest Frontier, where he might keep watch and ward in the spirit forever.—R.S.-W.)

---

Hush! a Sahib goes by!

From Dover cliffs to far Cashmir  
Rings the challenge, "Who goes there?"  
Thrilling slumbering echoes round the path by  
which you go;  
From Punjab plain to Calais pier  
The echoes leap from days that were,  
Fling the answer, bugle clear:  
"Friend—who loved a foe!"  
Rung-ho!

Bahadur, rung-ho!  
Rajah, nawab, zemindar,  
Maharaj and mehetah  
Lace with arched and lambent swords the path  
by which you go.  
From Rangoon up to Kandahar,  
By palace stilled and hushed bazaar,  
Your guard of honour flashes far,  
For India loved you so.

Rung-ho!  
Gurkha, Sikh and Mahratha,  
Sib 'neath battle's sanguined star,  
In right of sworn blood-brothers, flank the  
path by which you go;  
Ressaldar and havildar,  
Subadar and jemadar,  
Each a proven scimitar  
Tempered to the foe.

Teeming wards of Hindustan,  
Myriad hordes Mahometan  
Floor with flame of silken stuffs the path by  
which you go;  
By Bengal and Beluchistan,  
By Bolan Pass and Badakshan,  
An empire's manhood hails a man—  
"Bahadur, rung-ho!"

Cities glowing heavenward,  
Faint with history's spikenard,  
Kindle jewelled lamps to light the path by  
which you go.  
Proud Cawnpore, your cradle's ward;  
Delhi, darling to your sword,  
In magic gold your memory guard  
With sombre-dreamed Lucknow.

Afghan pass and dune of Scinde,  
Deccan wold and plain of Hind,  
Lift their fierce lament about the path by which  
you go.  
Himalaya stays the wind  
And, mocking, bids it seek and find  
One other of your hero-kind  
In its wide to-and-fro.

Bahadur, rung-ho!  
Hastings, Outram, Nicholson,  
With you in your tradition one,  
Salute you silently along the path by which  
you go  
To where you waits your soldier son,  
His hand upon a couchant gun.  
  
Then India turns her from the sun,  
For you loved India so.

November 19, 1914,  
Cowichan Station,  
Vancouver Island, B.C.

## THE SISTERS

---

"What of the day, O Picardie?  
    Cry us how goes the day;  
I have sent my children from sanctuary  
To keep the tryst of the blood for me,  
    My fee of kinship pay.  
Do the lilies, our Mother's lilies pale,  
Hold high their heads in the gloom and gale?  
Are they yet unstained in their beauty frail?  
    Sister, how goes the day?"

"Rest tranquil, sister Normandie;  
    The day goes well for France.  
Your sons are one with the sons of me,  
Pledged in blood and devoirie  
    To my deliverance.  
But the lilies, our Mother's lilies pale,  
Flaunt gules of pride on their argent mail.  
Yet never in gracious beauty fail,  
    So the day goes well for France."

"Do you ride alone, dear Picardie?  
    Strike alone and lonely stand?"  
"Nay, fear not, sister Normandie,  
Our Cousin of England rides with me,  
    Rides at my bridle hand.  
And my lilies pale and his roses gay  
Kindle the northern marches gray,  
Where a wounded Lion holds the way  
    Hard by the North Sea strand."

## REST CAMP

---

I know a road that winds all morn  
About a hanging wood;  
A road so still, a wood so green  
That all the world seems good.  
And stark against the whispering trees  
Lo! a living Rood.

Below the road a city lies,  
Its countless highways warm  
With russet-brown of humming tents;  
A place of hasty balm  
For those who sojourn for a space  
Held from the questing storm.

And all about are flowers abloom  
And lawns dressed orderly,  
So the heart beats once to a quicker step—  
The march of memory;  
And the oriflamme of white steel dulls  
To a pale phantasy.

A phantasy of faces strange,  
A shifting, drifting train;  
A phantasy of friends who come  
And friends who go again,  
And, passing, pass in God's ripe time  
Each to his greater gain.

For some of us are going on  
And some are coming back,  
As moves the shuttle to and fro  
Within the battle-wrack,  
And those must fill the places  
Which these have left in lack.

And up beyond the screening trees,  
Unseen but by the sun,  
Men play all day a grimmer game  
Than any save the one.  
And oft o' nights the phantom flare  
Unmasks the muzzled gun.

Men play all day the mimic game,  
Learning, the while they play,  
To fit them for the greater game,  
A role in the master-play.  
We call it "The Great Adventure."  
God give me my place and day!

Where lurks a way within the wood  
Steep down we march at even,  
And the dust of our going rises up  
Like the dust of gold to Heaven,  
Washed in the streams of startled light  
Where sun and gloom have striven.

While through the dusk a chateau grey  
Blinks a sleepy eye,  
As if to ask what echoings  
Disturb its seigneurie,  
Then sinks again to trooping dreams  
Of a gone century.

Somewhere in France,  
September 14th, 1916.

---

## LETTERS FROM HOME

---

You say such nice things in your letters, you dear people who  
write from Home,  
Had we time we'd be getting swelled-headed over here on the  
silly old Somme.  
We look and long for a letter and say bad words when there's  
none,  
While the A.P.O. earns our best blessing if it only chuck's out  
the one.  
Yes, we look and we long for your letters—but somehow, you  
know, it's queer—  
But the delight they give is a mixed one, the joy they give is  
too dear.  
For we're men while we're fooling out here, dears, if we never  
were men before,  
And men must be men all the time, dears, when they're fooling  
about with war.

And perhaps we resent it a little that you add to our daily  
"fatigue"—

Or is it the ration candle and the dug-out draught are in league  
To make such a job of the reading of these simple letters from  
you—

To make them blurry and smudgy—to make us just a bit blue?  
Yet I'd swear there's something else in it—I'd hate to ask any  
chap,

But I bet if I yelled "Cry-Baby!" there's some one would collar  
the cap!

Yes, they're simple enough, your letters, yet they say the deuce  
of a lot,

And we smother that frog-in-the-throat by making the tongue  
say "Rot!"

You see, we're just doing our job, dears—don't make it the  
harder to do

By saying such nice things about us in the letters that come  
from you.

We're just doing our silly old job here—a giddy old daily round  
Of fatigue and patrol and etceteras such as "getting to know  
your ground;"

With just now and then a spasm—you might almost call it a  
thrill—

Which takes us out of the common-or-garden grind of the mill,  
And makes us one with the star-shell—disembodied, radiant,  
clean,

Till we come back to earth like a dud, with a prayer that we  
haven't been seen

By some fool who's just as foolish as ourselves in his "crowded  
hour,"

And just as wise as we are when it's the other man's turn to  
"tower."

So don't make us one of the heroes, the johnnies the sages sing—  
Why! all of us love our fooling and the chance to have our fling,  
To play at this glorified "footer," to get just the fun we need—  
Still—a letter each week, if you can, dears—never mind if they're  
hard to read!

## THE RUNNERS OF THE SOMME

---

They didn't pull off any grand-stand play;  
They seldom did much in the gallery way;  
They were generally dirty and sometimes shaved,  
But never the flag of their country waved,  
Because they weren't just built that way.  
There wasn't much that they had to say,  
Unless it was on the subject of pay,  
Which amounted to quite a franc a day—  
Not enough, you'll admit, to marry on—  
    But they packed in their pouch  
    When out on a mooch  
    What's better than any brand of "hootch"—  
The motto, or badge, or what you please,  
Which in army circles is quite the "wheeze"—  
    The thing we call "Carry on!"

They'd grouch as every good soldier should,  
But they treated their job as if sawing wood.  
They took their turn as they took their rum,  
Without blast of bugle or tuck of drum.  
They knew, each hour, what they had to face,  
But it never struck them to slacken pace,  
Though "three by night and three by day"  
Must read the toll of their urgent way,  
Which often looked good to tarry on,  
    Because of the mud,  
    Or a neighbourly dud,  
    Or a noise not a little bit like a dud.  
They'd light up another weird issue fag,  
A "'Alf a Mo'" or a "Regent" or "Flag"—  
    And cheerfully "Carry on!"

They'd give the foot-slogger their simple praise,  
With no need for their own "laborious days."  
They guessed that the heroes at the gun  
Thought small potatoes of those who "run."  
But some Persons saw and made a note,  
And when they had time sat down and wrote  
In terms that astounded the blushing runner—  
Not to mention the past-pluperfect gunner—  
On the subject of how to "carry on,"  
    And took as a model  
    The ceaseless toddle—  
    In mud-time ludicrously like a waddle—  
That's now the fashion wherever you go  
Because the *brass hats* have made it so—  
    We call it the "Carry on!"

## AUTUMN AFTERNOON IN ARTOIS

---

On an Autumn afternoon—  
Dear September still was smiling—  
I, an idle hour beguiling,  
Watched a weary land aswoon  
In a brief surcease from pain;  
Hardly might I mark the stain  
Flung by battle's hand defiling;  
Distant hung the dull reviling  
Of the blackened lips of Cain,  
Ere, beneath the small, pale moon,  
Hell, refreshed, gave tongue again.

On that Autumn afternoon—  
Sweet September all aswoon—  
Seemed this land a gentle place,  
As the Lotus Land in grace;  
Hollowed softly to the eye  
In a shallow pleasauncie;  
A vast but gracious bowl of green  
Rimmed full round with deeper sheen  
Of copse and forest to the sky  
That leaned to kiss it sleepily.  
A fragrant bowl, a pot-pourri,  
It seemed that afternoon to me,  
A very gem of artistry.  
A bowl of dainty porcelain ware  
It lay around me, lying there  
Beneath its echoing further rim;  
Its colours were a little dim  
As must be beauty seen through tears  
Or beauty chastened by the years;  
And all its scents and all its sounds  
Were muted, as when one with wounds  
Lies in a room dressed soberly  
In lavender and dimity.  
But scents there were and sounds to hear:

The breath of flower that flouted fear,  
The voice of tiny, humble bird—  
A choir of these just now I heard—  
Who shamed me from the painted roof  
Of this my dream-land; quaint reproof  
From one who soared, remote, aloof  
From fear's thrice-harried strife with fear  
That man's vainglory thinks must tear  
All glad Creation's weft and woof.

Its colours were in minor key—  
The colours of my pot-pourri—  
Or so, perhaps, it seemed to me,  
Who knew my lovely flower-bowl lay  
In jeopardy from day to day,  
And had, in sooth, felt shock on shock  
That yet its beauty made a mock  
By adding pride to beauty's store  
And touching every crack and flaw  
With glory's whitely flaming brush.  
Howbeit, that day there drowsed a hush  
That clothed each moment with an awe  
Of things of guessing; and the more  
In mellowness of pigmentry,  
In still but lucent dignity  
Glowed my pot-pourri.

Ordered copse and forest dim,  
Fluted all the shallow rim  
In darkest green that sometimes crept,  
While restless-dreamed cloud-shadows slept,  
To where the whole wide floor was swept  
By green in all its hundred moods;  
By green of meadows, green of woods;  
By green a-sigh in broken pride  
For leafy way, for forest ride  
That loitered, ere the old world died,  
Soft-footed, shy, and fancy-free,  
Coy lists for woodland amourie;  
By green whose swelling bosom fed  
Ten little villages with bread;  
By green of richest mantling, flecked  
With russet kine and flocks who recked  
Nought but the distant meads that becked  
To fatter fare from day to day;  
By green a-gilt for honeyed hay.

And here and there in pattern bold  
The great highways, now grey and cold,  
Sprang up or couched, as, fold on fold,  
All the champaign before me rolled.  
The great highways with trumpet names  
That held in fee of riband-hold  
Cities whose storied deeds are flames  
To fire a world grown old.  
The white high-road on market-day,  
Ere dropt the sun his level ray,  
When the world was all a-sing  
And the sturdy metalling  
Set each sober hoof a-ring;  
And the sentry poplars dressed  
Their shadows swart towards the West,  
But shook them in the morning breeze  
To tell they only jested, lest  
The children in their high-day best  
Should doubt the friendly trees.  
The white high-road from day to day  
That bound each little village gay  
To neighbour village, rosy red  
In warm-tiled cote and wide-flung stead  
Whose timbers took the season's tone,  
Whose years had washed the mother-stone  
With russet, orange, green and brown,  
Whose shadows never seemed to frown  
But held the sunshine's memory  
In golden mote-dust, dancingly.

Orchard, garden, pleasaunce there  
Offered gifts of fragrance rare,  
Offered gifts to every sense,  
"Gold and myrrh and frankincense."  
And all about this homeland lay  
The homely breath of "every day,"  
The kindly touch of common-place  
Lifted by God to near His face.

So, that Autumn afternoon,  
When September still seemed smiling,  
I forgot the foul defiling  
Of a trinity of years,  
And, with imagery beguiling  
Place and hour from ambushed fears,  
Held a moment in my hand

As a gem that haunted land  
Ere, shocked rudely from her swoon,  
Shivering, crept abroad the moon.  
But now the sun in kindness shone  
This gem of craftsmanship upon  
And let his rainbow fingers lie  
Upon my porcelain pot-pourri;  
With master brush and pencil made  
Its bowl anew in shifting jade,  
And lit the patterned tracery  
Of village, hamlet, cote and byre  
To ruddy, pulsing flattery  
That shamed the thought that they must die  
And be as trampled one with mire.  
The bleaching flaws and fissures even,  
White as white bones of warm flesh riven,  
A shroud of cleaner kind were given,  
Enamel, or of ivory,  
And shyly riveted anew  
By rosemary here, and there by rue.

Nearby a shrinking, breathless plot  
Smiled for an hour, a beauty-spot  
Fluted with pearly, cruciform  
Emblazonings.

There, ensanct from storm,  
'Mid but not of the embattled throng  
Astride their dreams, sleep still and long  
A weary score whose task among  
Us ended soon.  
And ruby-red the poppy flew  
Its ensign clear, and sapphire-blue  
The cornflower jeweled the green, and sweet  
Was everywhere the marguerite.

Small, and afraid, anon the moon  
Her candle held, dim and awry,  
To night and hell and devilry.  
And then once more it seemed to me  
That chill and wan, in death aswoon  
And shattered, lay my pot-pourri.

September 9th, 1917.

## A SCRAP OF ALTAR-CLOTH

(Found in the famous Basilique of "The Leaning Virgin and Child" at Albert.)

---

A few tattered inches of velvet,  
A fragment of filth, if you please,  
But I'd wear such a gage in my helmet  
Were I a Plantagenet or Guise,  
And strike for the grime and the glory that gem it  
As for Cross and the Fleur de Lys.

Dingy and tarnished, its sable  
In the foul sable shadows had lain  
Of the outrage that once was the Table  
In a desolate, desecrate fane,  
While Hell's Pentecost raised its impious Babel  
'Gainst the shrine of our Lady of Pain.

Lambent gold yet flickered the runing  
That told how Christ His Peace  
Shall prevail despite Sword and its schooling;—  
And slily the spilled battle-lees  
From the goblet that brimmed when the year was at nooning  
Whispered yet at the walls of Pys.

And ever the Queen of Heaven  
Leaned low, ineffably meek,  
O'er her city, plundered and riven,  
From her painted basilique;  
And ever swept upward the souls unshriven,  
And were shrived by a Baby weak.

And Our Lady looked out on the city,  
And Our Lady looked out o'er the plain;  
And her eyes were as stars for pity,  
And her eyes were as pools for pain;—  
But the Babe at her breast smiled down on the city,  
And pledged the promise again.

Then the pledge winged over the torment,  
And out through the rain and gloam,  
And down the road as a portent—  
The road that is called Bapaume—  
And its pinions fluttered the murk a moment,  
And whispered to us of Home.

Humbly we trespass the Splendour—  
How long, O little Lord,  
Shall Earth red tribute render  
To the red, usurping Sword?  
By the Queen of all mothers, O Baby tender,  
Make manifest THY Word!

Courcelette Sunken Road, France.

---

### A LITANY OF LITTLE THINGS

---

Only they who walked with us  
A tempestuous trinity  
Of years that God made luminous  
In Heaven's heraldry,  
Know why one sings of the simple things  
A grateful litany.

---

We had our fill of the big things when,  
Their feet in the muddy ways  
But their eyes sky-clean of vision, men  
Challenged the furnace rays  
Of Honour's sun ere the sands were run  
In the glass of the Wonderful Days.

Now we dream of where the pretty things are,  
Loving of colour and form,  
In a land of houses and children, far  
From the scream of the dying storm;  
And none shall rail if we follow our Grail  
Amid things that are clean and warm.

A rose-red damask curtain hung  
At the cosy hush of day;  
A fairy khalif's carpet flung  
By a lantern's foolish ray  
Through the rainbow stain of a window-pane  
On a cobbled city-way;

A bit of brass that was dead, but glows  
On a cottage mantel-board;  
Buried four years and more. Who knows  
How the panting housewife's hoard  
Of homely things found fluttered wings  
In the breath of the nearing sword?

A plate that was thumbed at old Tournai  
In a forgotten pottery;

A film of cobweb lace that may  
Have woven its Odyssey

From a little nun in the cloistered sun  
Down a still canal to me;

A cup of crystal; a cross of gold;  
A Christus of ivory,

The Face, in the reverent centuries' mould,  
Redeemed of its agony;

Archangels four in azure and or  
On a jewelled blazonry;

A gilded cusp on the house of a king  
Throned in a sun-lit square;

An oaken balustrade a-wing

Up a stately oaken stair;

A buttress caught in a dream and wrought  
In wedded stone and air!

These are the things for which we seek

And give thanks on a velvet stool,  
While the eyes of a Virgin Mother meek

Trouble the golden pool

Where the candles blaze through the incense haze,  
To the glory of Sainte Gudule.

Headquarters-in-the-Field  
C.E.F., 1918.





